

## Sometimes your best job coach is...you

Franklin County residents with developmental disabilities who want to be employed can look to many sources of support—their Franklin County DD service coordinators, providers, advocacy organizations and the state's Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

But it's also important to remember how much a person can accomplish on his or her own, Franklin County DD board member Marci Straughter says. She landed a new job last fall after seeing a 'hiring' sign at one of her favorite stores and deciding to apply.



"It was a process, and a challenge, but I did it," said Straughter, the first person with DD to serve on the Franklin County board. "Normally, I might have a job coach, but since I knew the products, and I had a retail job before, I decided to go for it."

Straughter lives near Tuttle Mall and had long been a regular customer at the Bath & Body Works there. Her provider helped with the application, and "a magical interview" followed.

Store manager Janet Elias said Straughter's enthusiasm is a hit with shoppers. "She can't do the register, but that's okay," Elias said, as Straughter's personality allows her to excel up front. "And that's one of the most important positions in our store. That's a customer's first experience, and Marci is absolutely amazing there."

The enthusiasm is genuine. Straughter really does love the lotions, soaps, candles and other items. "I ask people if they're in a spa mood. That's one of my favorite lines," she said. "Or maybe they feel like something fruity?"

Though she's not sure how much longer the mall store will remain open, Straughter is glad she pursued the opportunity and grateful for the ongoing support of Franklin County DD service coordinator Janet Wilbur, Ohio at Home staff, and Bath & Body Works colleagues.

"If you have a place you want to work, or a place you love—maybe a store, a fast-food restaurant, a park or even a day program that you know—don't be afraid to try," she said. "They might be very happy to have you."

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## Save the dates for March DD month events

Join advocates, families, Franklin County DD staff and others at events and activities celebrating Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March.

**Here are three of the big ones coming up:**

**Sunday, March 1:** Community Day and Resource Fair (Autism and the Arts theme) at the Franklin Park Conservatory, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free with Columbus or Franklin County ID.

**Wednesday, March 4:** DD Awareness and Advocacy Day at the Ohio Statehouse Atrium, starting at 9 a.m. Registration fills fast; visit <https://ddohio.wordpress.com> for details and streaming information.

**Thursday, March 12:** Franklin County DD Day at the Columbus Museum of Art, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Admission is free for members of the Franklin County DD community.



# Parents of children with DD launch support group

As the six-week parenting course drew to an end, Hilary Harlan realized that she and other members of the group weren't ready to stop talking.

"Getting to know different parents through that Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) was pretty awesome," said Harlan, who has a 4-year-old son with developmental disabilities. "So when we got to the end, we were like, um, guys? Could we keep getting together?"

Phone numbers were exchanged, plans made, and a new, family-led support group for parents of children with disabilities and delays picked up where the course at the Franklin County DD Early Childhood Learning Community left off.

The aim of the bi-weekly support meetings is to help parents and caregivers find community, feel less isolated, and share resources, knowledge and ideas.

"We learn so much from each other as parents—it might be people at work, where you go to church, people you meet in the grocery line," Harlan said. "But what happens when your child is different?"

Beth Warner, a Franklin County DD social worker, said it's wonderful to see parents support each other. "I bring a lot of resources, but it really is their group," she said. "A lot of times parents of kids with disabilities feel like they don't have anyone to talk to, or someone who understands what they're going through. They feel safe there. There's empathy."

*The group meets on February 5 and February 19 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Whetstone branch library, 3909 N. High St. Meetings are every other Thursday. Email [elizabeth.warner@fcbdd.org](mailto:elizabeth.warner@fcbdd.org) or [hilarycharlan@gmail.com](mailto:hilarycharlan@gmail.com) for more information.*



# Ohio DD department, council have new leaders

The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) both have new—but familiar—faces in top leadership jobs.



Lyndsay Nash is now director of DODD, where she has held several positions since 2017. Nash became the department's interim director after former Director Kim Hauck retired last summer and also has served as in-house counsel, director of compliance and assistant director.

"I remain firmly committed to advancing a system that centers the voices, choices and dignity of people with disabilities, and to supporting the dedicated staff whose expertise and passion make this work possible each day," Nash said in a DODD announcement.

The DD Council recently named veteran staff member Paul Jarvis as its next executive director. He succeeds Carolyn Knight, who retired last year. Jarvis joined the council in 2005 and has headed its work on public policy grants and state and federal advocacy.



"I look forward to working with the members of the Council to implement their vision for what Ohio's system of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities should be," Jarvis said. "I am honored to be given this opportunity."

# Creative Housing tenants could win April rent discount

Creative Housing is celebrating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with a limited-edition logo, resident spotlights and special events, including a chance to receive a 35 percent discount on April rent.

Tenants and payees who sign up to use the Yardi Rent Café online portal by March 5 will be entered into a drawing. Creative Housing will randomly draw 35 names of new and existing members who will receive 35 percent off April rent. Winners are to be notified March 9.

To get started, call 614-418-7725 (option 3) or email [leasing@creativehousing.org](mailto:leasing@creativehousing.org)



# Reminder: Polar Plunge set for February 7



There's still time to support Franklin County Special Olympics athletes or make plans to attend the Columbus Polar Plunge on Saturday, February 7.

The fundraising event moves to a new location this year at Fortress Obetz, a sports and entertainment complex in southern Franklin County. Check-in starts at 9:30 a.m., followed by opening ceremonies, awards and a costume contest at approximately 10:40 a.m. Plunging starts around 11 a.m.

To support the Flyers' team, go to <https://support.soo.org/goto/FreezinFlyers26>

For event details or to register to plunge, visit <https://soo.org/polar-plunge/>

# Good For You

*Notable achievements in the Franklin County DD community*



The Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals began the new year with a new name: Lighthouse Cove. Leaders say the new name and identity better represent the scope of the organization's work on behalf of direct support professionals, reflecting a place of safety and guidance. "That's who we strive to be," Executive Director Bethany Toledo-McCray said. "A steady source of connection, learning, and support for people at every stage of their professional journey."

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Thanks to the Ohio State University College of Medicine's Disability Advocacy Coalition for the toy delivery! The coalition, which focuses on improving awareness and expertise of disability issues among medical professionals, conducts a toy drive to benefit our Early Childhood Education program.



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We're not only proud of the way Franklin County DD staff members serve the community, but also of how we support each other. Early Childhood Education staff have been wearing blue to help raise awareness of colon cancer and to support ECE instructor Roz Trego, whose husband was diagnosed with the disease five years ago. The couple are doing all they can to be active learners and stay strong, and they have a lot of people in their corner.

## Career Milestones

**30 Years**  
Letitia Porter  
Eric Vazquez

**25 Years**  
Loretta Bankston  
Stacie Meeks

**15 Years**  
Michele Sexton

**10 Years**  
Sondra Blue-Schneller  
Jazmine Davis  
Vincenzo Gualtieri

### Black History Month Spotlight

## Using our personal lens to sharpen professional perspective

As we enter Black History Month this February, it's important to pause—not just to recognize history, but to reflect on how our personal experiences shape the work we do each day.

Long before I became the first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator at Franklin County DD, the matter was personal for me. As the father of a biracial young man, I have centered my life on making sure my son grows up knowing diversity, equity and inclusion not as theory, but as lived experiences. In how he treats people. In how people treat him. In the environments he is welcomed into and the opportunities he has access to.

That personal lens is the same one I bring to my job. People trust Franklin County DD to create systems, services and spaces where dignity, respect and belonging are not optional; they are foundational.

In April of 2016, I had the opportunity to hear the educator Jane Elliott speak at Columbus State Community College. Elliott created the "blue eyes/brown eyes" exercise following the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., using eye color instead of skin color to teach her all-white classroom what discrimination feels like. The lesson became famous, and Elliott kept doing work that is uncomfortable, challenging and impossible to forget. The day I met her was no different.

At the time, I didn't realize that experience was preparing me for the work I would later do here at Franklin County

DD—work that requires us to confront bias, examine systems, and ask hard questions about equity and access. This work is not always comfortable, but it is necessary if we are serious about serving *all* people well.

I wore my *I Have a Dream* sweatshirt to Elliott's presentation, and left with a photo of a moment whose meaning I wouldn't fully understand until years later.

Black History Month reminds us that progress doesn't happen by accident. It happens because people are willing to learn, reflect and take responsibility for creating better systems. At Franklin County DD, this commitment shows up in how we serve individuals, support families, collaborate and hold ourselves accountable.

This month and every month, I encourage us all to consider how personal stories influence professional impact, and how we can contribute to a culture where everyone belongs.



*Sean Patterson served as a Franklin County DD service coordinator for 14 years. He was named the agency's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator in 2023.*

# Waiver changes include technology, remote support services

Updated rules for Individual Options (IO), Level 1 and SELF Medicaid waivers took effect in January and include changes to assistive technology, remote support and support broker services.

For example, the assistive technology definition has been revised to also include non-electronic items such as pencil grips, weighted pens and communication boards. And the IO and Level 1 waivers now allow for a 'support broker,' or someone who coaches and mentors individuals with disabilities so that they can make informed choices and live more independently.

To learn more about the updates, visit the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities website at:

[https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/Waiver Redesign/2026-waiver-changes](https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/Waiver_Redesign/2026-waiver-changes)

## STABLE account eligibility expanded, fees reduced

A change in federal law has expanded eligibility for STABLE accounts by raising the age of disability onset from 26 to 46. This includes adults who developed disabilities later in life, veterans with service-connected disabilities, and guardians or legal representatives supporting adults with disabilities.

Maintenance fees for accounts also were reduced as of Jan. 1, and new account holders can receive a match of \$25 on their initial deposit.

"This new eligibility expansion will allow so many more Ohioans to take advantage of the empowerment,

independence, and financial security that STABLE account offers to those living with disabilities," Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague said.

STABLE accounts are specialized savings and investment accounts for people with disabilities. They allow people to save and invest their money without losing benefits such as Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

To learn more or to sign up, visit

[www.stableaccount.com](http://www.stableaccount.com)

## Dateline

The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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*The Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities does not discriminate in employment or services on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, or disability.*

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Information about Franklin County DD is always available on the internet at:

[www.fcbdd.org](http://www.fcbdd.org)



## Calendar

### February, 2026

- 5 Franklin County DD Public Hearing - IDEA and 2025 Progress Report/ 2026 Annual Action Plan review. Held in-person at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus, also available on Zoom.  
**FCBDD Public Hearing Zoom Link:**  
<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>
- 7 Special Olympics - Polar Plunge at "Fortress Obetz" Check-in begins at 9:30 a.m. Opening ceremonies are at approximately 10:40 a.m. and plunging begins at 11 a.m. Fortress Obetz is located at 2015 Recreation Trail, Obetz, Ohio.
- 11 Franklin County DD Early Childhood Learning Community (**ECLC**) and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through at 4:30 p.m. at **ECLC, 4141 Rudy Road**, Columbus, 43214. For more details, email Gretchen Uhl at [gretchen.uhl@fcbdd.org](mailto:gretchen.uhl@fcbdd.org)
- 16 President's Day. All county facilities closed.
- 19 Franklin County DD Early Childhood Education (**Johnstown Road**) and the Mid-Ohio Food Collective Produce Drive Through at 4:30 p.m. in the ECEFC Bus Lane (accessed via Marilyn Lane). For more details, email Sarah Gillilan at [sarah.gillilan@fcbdd.org](mailto:sarah.gillilan@fcbdd.org)
- 26 Franklin County DD Self-advocate Advisory Council, meets at 2879 Johnstown Road, 10 a.m. Contact Ryan Phillips for details by email at [ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org](mailto:ryan.phillips@fcbdd.org) OR by phone at 614-342-5984
- 26 Franklin County DD Regular Board meeting, at 5 p.m. at 2879 Johnstown Road, Columbus. Board committee meetings begin at 4 p.m. Please contact Amy Magginis at 614-342-5950 for details.

**FCBDD Board Meeting Link:**

<https://bit.ly/3JvZSUJ>